

the summers of our youth by thenewromantics

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Gen

Language: English

Characters: & The Gang, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-08-16

Updated: 2018-08-16

Packaged: 2022-04-23 02:27:26

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,836

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

the summer of nineteen eighty five is the best summer of el hopper's young life and it's not just because she has the worst summers in the world to compare it too.

aka, nineteen eighty five makes up for every year before it.

the summers of our youth

Author's Note:

this started out as a text post that i almost wrote on tumblr and now it's a 3.5k one shot. funny how that ends up happening sometimes. this is definitely more of a retrospective fic about el then it is a fic with any actual plot, but i'm pretty proud of it so!! enjoy!!

Summer 1983

The days still passed in a blur. After years of the same routine day in and day out, nothing surprised Eleven anymore.

It was the same wake up call, the slamming of the door against the wall and a flood of harsh white light into her dark room. Being forced to leave her stiff bed, immediately being followed and guided by the usual men in their dark suits and cold eyes.

Eleven had no idea what day it was. She never did. Every day was exactly the same. Well, not exactly. Sometimes she had celery with her bread at night instead of carrots, or the harsh woman, with her bright red hair and dark lips, would trim the nails on her toes and feet when washing her hair and arms. But most days were exactly the same, no change.

Part of Eleven enjoyed the fact that every day was the same. It gave her time to prepare herself in the mornings, when she would awaken before the door would slam. She always knew what to expect. Of course the things she was asked to do would vary from day to day, but it was always in the same vein, and always involved her powers.

Listen to the Russian men. Find the monster. Kill the cat.

None of them were things that Eleven wanted to do, but she had learned time and time again that it was best not to argue. Papa never liked when she argued. Even on days when his smile seemed a little

brighter, or his touch seemed a little softer, he never liked when she argued.

So she didn't. At least she tried her hardest not to. Even when she was forced in the tank, which was her least favorite. She hated the way the water pushed up against her body, the way the air helmet weighed heavy against her shoulders, pushing her further and further into the water. Those were the days that it was hardest to contain her anger against Papa.

"Now Eleven, I know you hate this, but you're the only person who is able to do it. So, it's in your best interest not to argue with me. You know I would never do anything to harm you." He would say, when he's in her room at night, touching his finger to her nose. The contact would make her squirm, but she never showed it when he was still there. He hated when she coiled away from him.

Occasionally he would press his cold, lifeless lips to her forehead and she would wait until he was out of the room, the space blanketed in darkness to rub the feeling from her skin against the harsh cotton of the pillow. She would do it with her back turned, so the small camera in the top corner of her room wouldn't catch her.

When she had been younger, smaller and more prone to trembling and crying loudly in the night, the camera used to be a god send. Papa would come in when he saw her in distress, stroking her head and hugging her tightly to his chest. As a young girl she used to think this meant he loved her, and wanted her to be safe and happy, but she didn't know if any of that was true anymore.

So, at night she would turn away from the camera, even as her hot and heavy tears would roll down her cheeks, dampening the rough blanket underneath her body. She would pull her knees into her chest, tucking herself into her gown, desperate for any kind of warmth in the cold chill of her room.

Every night she would shiver and shake in bed, her lips going numb and raw from the cool air that would come in through the ceiling, dreaming and wishing she could go somewhere warm. She wondered if the places she saw in her dreams, with warm light and soft ground beneath her feet existed and how far beyond the lab she would have

to go to find them.

She knows that they're only just dreams though, and she's stuck in her cold, uncomfortable room for the foreseeable future. That she'll wake up in the morning to the banging of the door and Papa's tight smile and cold hands against her wrists. She's been here for days, days that are the same from beginning to end and she knows that she'll be here for days and days to come.

But gosh, does she hope that someday she'll be able to feel the warmth she dreams about.

Summer of 1984

Summer in the cabin is stuffy, hot and lonely.

It's miles better than her life in the lab though, and for that she can't bring herself to complain about anything.

Because she's not alone, she has Hopper. Who has to work during the days but sometimes brings ice cream home, letting her have a couple scoops after dinner, even letting her put it on her waffles if she asks nicely. He lets her stay up later too, even letting her watch R rated movies on TV when he doesn't have to work the next morning.

Sure, she misses her friends and wishes she was allowed to leave, and not just stand out on the porch, which Hopper lets her do sometimes when there's a nice breeze or a summer rain storm (which El quickly learns is her favorite kind of weather, because it reminds her of that night in the woods all those months ago when she met Mike and Lucas and Dustin), but she has a real bed now, with soft sheets and Hopper never opens the door to her room without knocking first.

It's progress from the lab, and that's all matters to El.

Besides, even though Hopper is very strict about her leaving the house and keeping the shades drawn during the day (which El hates the most of any of the rules because it makes the cabin *so hot*), he's

stopped chastising her for visiting Mike in the void every night. Which means every night he helps her bring the television into her room and for thirty minutes he busies himself with the newspaper or case paperwork and leaves her be.

She would be lying if she said that these visits to Mike weren't her absolute favorite part of being in the cabin. Sure, it hurt more than anything that she couldn't reach out and touch him or talk to him, but seeing him every day and knowing that he was okay, that was enough for her.

He's grown taller since that fateful night back in November (months are something she's been learning with Hopper, months and dates, which all started when he had to explain to her what July 4th was when the loud, explosion like noises could be heard in the distance), even though he's usually sitting when she sees him, sometimes she catches him pacing back in forth the length of the Wheeler basement.

The heat has made his hair grow too, the first time she saw it curled on the ends and in a wild mane around his head she laughed so hard she almost lost her concentration in the void (it wasn't as funny the next day when she woke up and her hair was a poofy, curly mess, causing Hopper to giggle at her at the breakfast table). Hopper had told her that the humidity made people's hair grow, El didn't know what humidity was, or why it made people's hair grow, but it certainly made Mike look funny.

One day when she saw him, his skin was bright red and she felt her heart stop. It looked like his skin was on fire, and that it would burn her finger if she touched him. He looked uncomfortable, picking at his skin as he spoke softly into his walkie to her. The sight had made her heart squeeze uncomfortably in her chest and instead of just the light sprinkle of tears she usually had when listening to Mike, she exited the void that night sobbing, her chest heaving and tears falling heavily from her eyes.

"It's called a sunburn, kid." Hopper tells her the next morning when she mentions it. "A lot of people get them in the summertime. You get them when you spend too much time in the sun."

"Summertime?" El asks, her voice small and quiet. She's heard the

word before, on television, and when Hopper is muttering to himself about how “ *damn rowdy* ” teenagers get in the summer. She has a vague sense of what it means, something to do with school being out and it being warm, but that’s about as far as her knowledge takes her.

“Yeah, it’s what this time of year is called. It gets hot, kids aren’t in school anymore.” El nods. “It’s like when I found you, remember how cold it was and all the snow that was on the ground?”

“Yes.” El whispers, practically shivering. She remembered all too well the time she spent in the woods, twenty eight days, she counted, and how the cold, lonely whiteness had reminded her of the lab. She had been so sure she was going to die out there, get to briefly feel what it would have been like to be normal before having it ripped away from her.

“Well, that was winter time.” Hopper says, taking a bite of his waffle. “It’s a season, just like summer is. Fall is the time of year it was when you met Mike and Lucas and Dustin, with all the leaves on the ground.” El nods, beginning to understand. “And spring was the season we just had, when all the birds started making noise.” Hopper grumbles and El can’t help but giggle softly.

She’s pretty sure that winter is her least favorite of the seasons. She hasn’t quite made her mind up about summer yet.

Sometimes she loves it, like when Hopper lets her sit under the open window at night so she can watch the sunset and the stars decorate the sky. Or when he brings a device home with him one evening, a fan he calls it, and he plugs it in in the corner of her room, sending a cool, but not too cold, breeze, over her as she sleeps.

But sometimes she hates it, like when her hair frizzes around her ears and makes them itch. Or when she sits cross legged on the couch and they stick together because of how hot and sticky it is. She hates how opening the small window in her bedroom, something Hopper allowed her to do when all the lights in the cabin were off, provided no relief.

“Next summer is gonna be better, I promise.” Hopper says softly to her one night as she’s sitting on the couch, still wiping away her stray

tears after visiting Mike. He comes to sit next to her, the couch dipping under his weight.

“Really?” She whispers, glancing down at her crossed legs, which even in the early evening are still coated with a sheen on sweat. Tonight had been particularly hard watching Mike, he had been trying his hardest not to cry as he mentioned something about fighting with his dad.

“Really.” Hopper says, moving one arm so it’s draped behind her on the couch. “I’m gonna try my hardest to make sure that next summer you get to be out there with your friends instead of cooped up in here.”

El feels herself smile. Hopper’s said stuff like this before, but this time feels different. That night she dreams of running around in the sunshine with her friends, the warm sunlight on her face and the wind in her hair. It’s the same kind of dreams she used to have in the lab, only now she has hope that someday they’ll come true.

So, El doesn’t quite love summer yet, but she thinks that could change.

Summer of 1985

The next summer is hands down the best summer of El’s life.

Hop teases her when she tells him this, reminding her that she doesn’t have much to compare it to and that she’s only fourteen, but El doesn’t care. She doesn’t think any summer in the future will be able to compare to the summer of ‘85 (she’s wrong, turns out that every summer only gets better and better, but when she’s fourteen she has no idea).

Because the summer of 1985 is exactly the summer that El had always dreamed of. She spends day in and day out in the sunshine, running around with her friends, collapsing in laughter, getting grass stains on all of her new clothes and occasionally pulling Mike behind

trees or large rocks so she can press a kiss to the sun kissed, well freckled apple of his cheek away from the prying eyes of their friends.

She learns that summer that she actually really loves summer. But that's not the only thing she learns.

In the middle of July, July 17th according to the calendar she now keeps above her bed, day two hundred and fifty four according to the numbered days since she returned that Mike now whispers to her in the nightly walkie calls, she learns to swim. At first it reminds her too much of the baths from the lab, of the heavy water against her skin, but with soft whispered words of encouragement from Mike and the cheers of her friends, she manages to swim the length of the Harrington pool without much trouble.

(Turns out that El is the fastest swimmer of all of them, beating even Lucas in a race.)

A couple days later she gets her first sunburn. She wakes up in the morning her skin burning, red and raw against the stretch of her shoulders and on the back of her knees. Hopper chastises her for spending too much time in the sun without sunscreen, but El is just happy that she has a mark on her skin to represent how much time she gets to spend outside.

When she shows the burn to Mike, he tells her that eventually it'll fade and maybe her sunburns will turn into freckles just like his usually do.

In the first week of August, she finally learns how to ride a bike all by herself. Each member of the party had attempted to teach her at some point, but Will ended up being the one who was able to get through to her. In that moment when he let go and she was actually *riding* her bike (a well loved, dinged up hand me down that Hop found at a yard sale a couple months ago), where the wind was running through her hair and her friends were clapping, El felt like she could do anything.

Those weren't the only things she loved about summer.

When the heat first started to settle on Hawkins, El feared that there would be a repeat of last year and she would never be able to find relief in the small cabin, but even that was different this summer. One night after work Hop came home with a machine, much larger and more complicated looking than the simple fan that still sat in her bedroom.

“This is an AC unit.” He had said, plugging the device in next to one of the windows, letting the cool air fill the cabin. The air reminded her of a brief second, but then she caught a glance of Hop’s content smile and she couldn’t help but grin herself.

“I love it.”

Hop doesn’t respond, simply reaches over and rustles the hair on her head, which is longer this year but still wild and curly and frizzy in the heat of the summer. The gesture fills El with a warm pool in her stomach and she decides that she likes the feeling. She likes it a lot.

There are other moments that summer where her stomach flips and her heart soars and she feels like she’s floating. A lot of moments, actually.

Like when Max hugs her from behind one night when the gang is trying to catch fireflies, her breath tickling El’s ear as she squeezes her. Or when Dustin laughs at one of her jokes, crisp and clear as they eat peanut butter sandwiches in the Wheeler backyard.

She feels it when Lucas slings an arm around her shoulder and pulls her into his chest after she uses her powers to help them win the game of frisbee they’re playing in the park. Or when Will shares his ice cream with her at Scoop’s Ahoy without her even asking, so they can try each other’s flavors. (She also feels it when Steve winks at her as he hands her a cone over the counter, with a bright, “*free of charge, Ellie.*”)

But she especially feels it with Mike.

That feeling, the feeling that she wants to bottle up and never ever forget, comes to her often when she’s with Mike. She feels it when he holds her hand as they walk in the woods around the cabin. Or when

they hug goodnight on the porch and his heart beats soundly against her chest.

Then, of course there's the feeling she gets when he kisses her. And while the feeling certainly isn't new to the summertime, somehow it nearly doubles, no, triples, when Mike and El trade kisses in the bright summer sunshine, or in the warm evening dusk. There's just something so *magical* about it, El can't seem to put her finger on why, but she knows that she *loves* it.

El quickly realizes that there are a lot of magical things about the summertime, things she had only ever dreamed about.

The best day of the summer of '85 comes in the final days of August, only a couple days before school starts up again. Joyce and Hop decide that the kids (including Nancy, Jonathan and Steve) deserve a day away from Hawkins, so they pack up the blazer and the Byers cars and take a day trip to a lake a few towns over.

"What's the difference between a lake and the quarry?" El asks Mike from the backseat of the blazer. Dustin is the only other occupant in the car, who much to Hop's chagrin had called shotgun, and he turns around to begin to explain, but Mike cuts him off.

"I mean, I guess the difference between a lake, well at least the lake we're going to, and the quarry is that lakes have beaches." Mike says with a small shrug.

"And they don't have gigantic cliffs that you can jump off of." Dustin quips from the front seat, causing Mike to roll his eyes.

El's hardly paying attention to them though, she's instead thinking about what Mike said. *Beaches*. She's only ever heard of beaches on television, she's never even seen one. From what she's heard about them, people go to them in the summer and swim in the water. She doesn't really understand what makes beaches so different from pools, but she supposes she's about to find out.

Turns out, beaches are everything she had ever dreamed of.

"Usually beaches are by the ocean, but the ocean doesn't reach

Indiana so we have to make due to lake beaches, which are still really fun.” Mike says when they get there, shrugging as he helps El from the car, grabbing her bag and shouldering it along with his own.

“And we don’t have to worry about getting attacked by sharks.” Dustin adds, coming up next to them and taking a bite of his candy bar. Hop is already down the beach, setting up a place for the party to drop their stuff, but the trio are walking slowly, letting El absorb the scenery and waiting for the rest of the group to show up.

El is absolutely enthralled.

Kicking off her plastic flip flops, she lets her feet sink in the warm, soft sand, sighing softly when he gets between her toes. There’s a small breeze coming off the water that rustles her hair. El doesn’t think she’s ever felt so at peace.

Soon after, the rest of the party, along with Nancy, Jonathan, Steve and Joyce show up and soon the beach, in which their group are the only occupants of, is full of laughter and loud voices.

About halfway through the day, after eating a lunch of tuna fish sandwiches and bags of potato chips and sharing a orange soda (El’s new obsession this summer) with Mike, El finds herself standing on the shore of the lake, her toes in the water and a soft smile on her face as she watches the people in her life.

Hop and Joyce are situated on one of the blankets, chatting and keeping their eyes on the kids. There are easy smiles on both of their faces and they both look more at peace then El has ever seen them before.

The teenagers, well the older teenagers, have disappeared down the beach, and El can spot Jonathan and Steve shin deep in the water, skipping rocks and laughing with each other. Nancy is sitting in the sand, a book in her lap, occasionally looking up and smiling at the boys. El doesn’t quite know exactly what happened between the three of them, and apparently neither did Mike or Will when she asked, but she’s happy that they’re happy.

In the middle of the lake El spots Max, Lucas, Dustin and Will playing

a game in the deep water of the lake. (El had tried swimming in this water, but it reminded her too much of the bath with it's dark water, so she settles for standing on the edge). Lucas has Max hooked on his shoulders and Dustin has Will on his and Will and Max's hands are clasped together. El isn't quite sure what they're doing, but she can hear their laughter from the shore and it makes her smile.

"Having fun?" Mike asks, suddenly next to her. His hair is a wild mane of black curls around his face and she can already see his cheeks going pink, and the sight makes her smile.

"Yeah." She nods, looking back out at their friends, who are now cheering as Max sits victoriously on Lucas' shoulders and Will floats in the water next to them.

"So you like the beach?" He's grinning at her, his eyes bright. El gulps, suddenly overcome with emotion. She takes a deep breath, looking up at the sky, the sunlight warming her face and filling her entire body with happiness.

Her hand finds Mike's next to her and she threads their fingers together easily. "It's everything I've ever dreamed of."

And on that August day, in the warmth of the late August sun with Mike's hand in hers, El decides that yes, she does indeed love summer.

Author's Note:

i kind of hate the last sentence, but that's how i wanted to connect it to the first section so it'll have to do. either way, let me know what you think!! this was super fun to write, so i sincerely hoped you all enjoyed!

thanks for reading!